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SUBJECT: VENEZUELA NOMINATIONS FOR THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S
AWARD FOR INTERNATIONAL WOMEN OF COURAGE

REF: STATE 12871

¶1. (U) Post identified a number of potential nominees for the Secretary of State's Award for International Women of Courage. Because of the abundance of deserving candidates, post has decided to nominate two Venezuelan Women of Courage for Washington's consideration. Both are working for the social advancement of women and trying to preserve democratic freedoms in the increasingly authoritarian Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

¶2. (U) Nominee: Daniela Bergami

¶3. (U) Title, Institution: General Manager of RCTV

¶4. (U) Date of Birth: July 12, 1955

¶5. (U) Contact Information: Ph: 58-212-401-2346; Mobile: 0416-622-3241; email Dbergami@hotmail.com

¶6. (SBU) Justification: Daniela Bergami, General Manager of embattled RCTV, is leading the defense of free press in Venezuela as President Chavez seeks to close down the television station which she manages. Bergami has long been a role model for successful professional women in an industry dominated by men, but the government's assault on RCTV has given her role and gender added prominence. Bergami has not been intimidated by the Chavez government's vocal attacks on her station. To the contrary, she has rallied the station's management and its employees to continue their work and to maintain their focus on objective and unflinching news coverage, while leading a counter-campaign to generate hemispheric support for the station and against the government's crass and politicized assault against freedom of the press in Venezuela.

In addition to her high-profile work at RCTV, Bergami has participated in numerous conferences and seminars on women's leadership and has worked tirelessly to provide opportunities for women to reach their professional goals, including promoting them from within. Bergami is a member of several leadership organizations, including the American Institute of Management Resources, the International Women's Forum and the American Society for Quality Control.

Daniela Bergami graduated from the Central University of Venezuela with a degree in industrial psychology. She has been the General Manager of Venezuela's leading television stations, Radio Caracas Television (RCTV) since 2000, and has worked for the station for nearly 20 years.

¶7. (U) Nominee: Monica Fernandez

¶8. (U) Title, Institution: Founder and Executive Director

of Justice NGO Foro Penal

¶9. (U) Date of Birth: July 2, 1972

¶10. (U) Contact Information: Phone: 0414-027-6582; email monifersan@hotmail.com

¶11. (SBU) Justification: Monica Fernandez is the founder and executive director of justice NGO Foro Penal. Foro Penal is committed to providing proof of the deterioration of the rule of law in Venezuela.

Foro Penal, with Fernandez serving as one of its most vocal and visible spokespersons, has released reports scathingly critical of the Venezuelan justice system's increasing politicization. Fernandez has publicly alleged that the judicial and prosecutorial authorities in Venezuela have progressively undermined the law since the events of April ¶2002.

Fernandez is an outspoken critic of the government during a time when the current regime is increasingly hostile to even its more muted critics, much less critics as virulent as Fernandez. What magnifies Fernandez's courage in this environment is that she maintains her principled position even in the face of legal charges against her very person.

On April 11, 2002, then a Caracas criminal court judge, Fernandez ordered then-Interior Minister Ramon Rodriguez Chacin confined to his home on charges based on the allegation that he was no longer a minister following President Chavez's alleged resignation. She ordered Rodriguez freed the next day, when it appeared that Chavez had not resigned. Over two years later, the government opened a criminal case against Fernandez. Although Fernandez

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had eventually ordered the then-minister's release, the Fourth Appeals Court of Caracas ruled that Fernandez had committed an "inexcusable error." Fernandez contends that the ruling was made as a pretext for her firing. Fernandez resigned rather than face termination. Monica Fernandez continues to face criminal charges stemming from this incident.

Chavez's usurpation of the judicial powers and the increasing repression of freedom of expression under his rule create an environment in which public criticism of the government often results in anything from harassment to incarceration. Moreover, Chavez often uses the judicial system to "legally" prolong the agony of his critics and/or political opponents. Monica Fernandez, sitting underneath the hanging sword of Damocles otherwise known as the Venezuelan judicial system, chooses not to sit at all. Rather, she stands up in the face of adversity, she stands up in the face of baseless charges pending against her, she stands up for what she believes, and continues to courageously stand for an honorable, efficient, and fair system of justice in Venezuela.

¶12. (U) Embassy Caracas's officer responsible for women's issues is Poloff Ms. Veronica Torres; phone: 58-212-907-8052; e-mail: TorresV@state.gov.

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